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CIA Shuffle: Can George Do It?

President Ford has finally come up with a passable program for reorganizing the intelligence community. But the effectiveness of the program depends heavily on detailed application in practice. In particular it is a question whether George Bush, the director of Central Intelligence, has it in him to establish an evaluative agency of high quality that is distant from both the CIA, with its spy mania, and the White House with its overwhelming pressure for applause instead of analysis.

To be sure, the President's program includes many different proposals. But most of the new ideas are paper improvements that can only be effective if the basic day-to-day operation works.

That principle includes the Intelligence Oversight Board made up of three distinguished outsiders; the proposal for a joint congressional oversight committee; the call for a semi-annual review; and the development of a full cabinet committee to replace what used to be the 40 Committee.

Similarly with the provision whereby officials who undertake to receive classified material can be made subject to civil and criminal penalties for divulging that information. Such a statute, applying only to those who have accepted government work, is clearly preferable to a broad Official Secrets Act which could be used against all citizens. Even so, the application of the rule will be discretionary and will again depend heavily on day-to-day operations.

In these circumstances, the centerpiece of the new structure is the three-man Committee for Foreign Intelligence, chaired by Mr. Bush as director of Central Intelligence. The committee will have control over all the many different agencies in the intelligence community. That includes the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Secu-

rity Agency. This control is to be exercised primarily through careful scrutiny of budgets and programs. In addition, Mr. Bush and his committee are to evaluate the work of the different agencies stimulating competition and eliminating duplication. Finally, Mr. Bush is to make sure that the White House puts the right questions to the intelligence community—not as so often in the past the kind of questions that cause the intelligence community to support whatever the President takes it into his head to do.

The recommendation to give such power to the director of Central Intelligence is not new. It was advanced by former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger back in 1971 when he was serving in the Bureau of the Budget. At that time President Nixon approved the notion.

But the idea failed in practice. Richard Helms, then director of Central Intelligence, never divorced himself from the CIA, which he continued to head and where he continued to work. He was regarded as an interloper by



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the other intelligence agencies who never let him dominate their budgets or programs. The White House also continued to regard him as a kind of spy master, who could be used for the dirtiest of Watergate tricks.

Mr. Bush, accordingly, has an exceedingly difficult task ahead of him. He will need to recruit a new staff with an outlook and a home apart from both the CIA and the White House. He himself will have to put the CIA under a deputy so that he can act impartially in judging its conflict with the other intelligence agencies. He will also have to put behind him his partiality to President Ford, so the White House can be rapped when it asks the wrong questions or demands a mere imprimatur.

I hope—though I have some doubts that were fortified by the President's bumbling discussion of the matter at his press conference—that Mr. Bush is up to the job, for other parts of the general package are quite disconcerting. The Federal Bureau of Investigation gets carte blanche for do-

mestic counter-intelligence activity. And there is no provision for a net assessment—an absolutely essential intelligence function whereby the capabilities and intentions of the other side are measured against our own.

Moreover, the program has been an unconscionably long time coming. Its need has been pre-visible since the revelations by The New York Times in late 1974 of CIA interference in domestic affairs. In the interim, Mr. Ford has wasted time with the Rockefeller Commission and started a hare with the assassination issue. A Senate committee and a House committee and at least a portion of the press have allowed themselves to look like fools. The whole world has been scratching its head in bewilderment about what the United States is up to in the intelligence field.

If Mr. Bush can deliver the goods, it may all have been worthwhile. If not, the country has paid a terribly heavy price while waiting for the mountain to deliver what is only a mouse.

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